



# Teaching English language learner students: professional standards in elementary education in Central Region states



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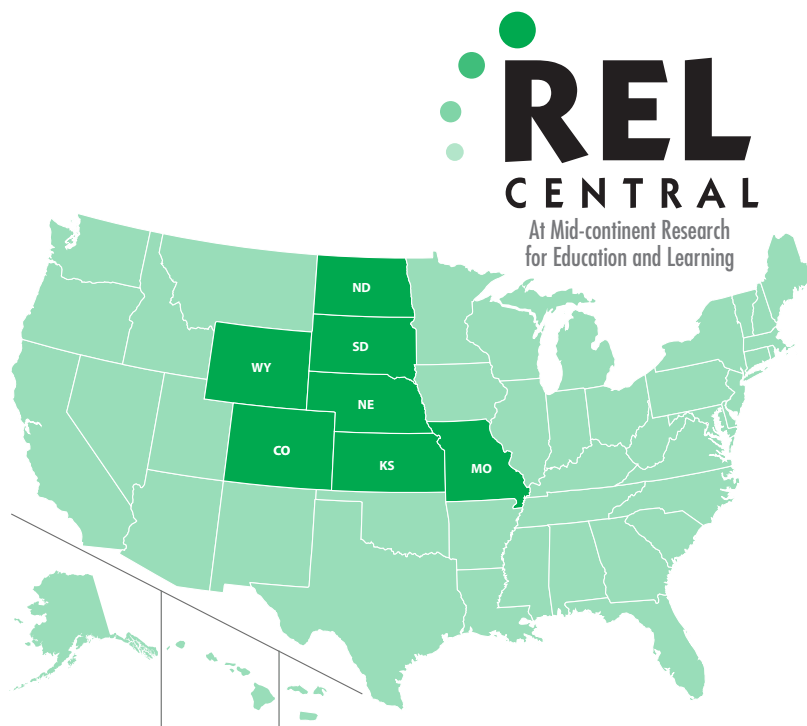
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# Teaching English language learner students: professional standards in elementary education in Central Region states

**This report on professional teaching standards in the Central Region examines what K–8 general education teachers are expected to know and be able to do in order to teach English language learner students. It reviews the standards for coverage of six topics that the research literature suggests are important for improving student achievement.**

Nationally, more English language learner (ELL) students are enrolled in schools than ever before. As Lucas and Grinberg note, “the diversity of English language abilities among students in mainstream classes has increased” (2008, p. 608), which can challenge teachers in these classrooms. Because it can take five to seven years for ELL students to become proficient enough in English to succeed academically (Hakuta, Butler, and Witt 2000), the quality of both mainstream teachers and certified English as a second language teachers is important for student success (Ballantyne, Sanderman, and Levy 2008). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 recognizes the importance of teachers to student success and calls on states to develop and implement teacher evaluation systems that recognize, encourage, and reward teaching excellence and that inform professional development and guidance for

teachers and principals to improve student learning (U.S. Department of Education 2010).

The number of ELL students in Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Central Region schools is increasing, too. Between 2000 and 2008, it increased 66.6 percent in North Dakota, 62.5 percent in Kansas, 56.6 percent in Missouri, 52.2 percent in Nebraska, 28.7 percent in Colorado, 8.8 percent in South Dakota, and 5.3 percent in Wyoming (U.S. Department of Education 2007/08). Education leaders concerned about workforce development and quality in Central Region states need to know how well their professional standards are addressing the knowledge and skills teachers should have for teaching ELL students.

To accommodate these students’ learning needs in mainstream classrooms, teachers must know how and when to modify instruction and build on their students’ existing knowledge (Gersten et al. 2005). Teaching standards, which specify what teachers should know and be able to do, provide a common set of professional expectations for teacher preparation programs, licensure, professional development outcomes, and job performance (Blanton, Sindelar, and Correa 2006; Council of Chief State School Officers 2010; Danielson

2008; North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission n.d.).

This report builds on a recent REL West study of professional standards for K–12 teachers (White, Makkonen, and Stewart 2010). Responding to the requests of chief state school officers and district superintendents in the seven Central Region states, the current report examines the knowledge and skills that K–8 teachers in these states are expected to have in order to improve the academic outcomes of ELL students across six topics: recognizing and supporting diverse language backgrounds, differentiating instruction, selecting materials or curricula, knowing theories of second language acquisition and related strategies of support, communicating with students and families, and assessing students’ language status and development.

The following research question guides this study:

- To what extent do professional teaching standards in the Central Region include knowledge and skills that research has identified as important for K–8 general education teachers to teach ELL students?

Key findings include:

- All seven Central Region states include knowledge and skills for teaching ELL students in their teaching standards, referencing at least two topics: differentiating

instruction to accommodate the learning needs of ELL students and communicating with students and families for whom English is not their native language.

- Five states (Kansas, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming) reference recognizing and supporting diverse language backgrounds; four states (Kansas, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming) reference knowing theories of second language acquisition and related strategies of support.
- No states reference selecting materials or curricula to accommodate the learning needs of ELL students.
- The number of ELL-related topics in each state’s standards ranges from two to five. Colorado and Nebraska reference two (differentiating instruction and communicating with students and families). Missouri references one additional topic (recognizing and supporting diverse language backgrounds), while North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming reference two additional topics (recognizing and supporting diverse language backgrounds and knowing theories of second language acquisition and related strategies of support). Finally, Kansas references one additional topic (assessing students’ language status and development), for a total of five topics.

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